The Uncrowned Nation.

A

DISCOURSE COMMEMORATIVE

OF

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

BY

REV. EDWIN A. BULKLEY.

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A

DISCOURSE

COMMEMORATIVE OF THE

DEATH OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN,

SIXTEENTH PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES:

PREACHED IN THE

First Presbyterian Church of Plattsburgh, N. Y.

April 19, 1865,

BY THE PASTOR,

REV. EDWIN A. BULKLEY.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

PLATTSBURGH, N. Y., MAY 1, 1865.

REV. EDWIN A. BULKLEY,

PASTOR OF THE FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF PLATTSBURGH :—

REVEREND AND DEAR SIR :

The sentiments of the discourse delivered by you, on the 19th of April last, commemorative of the life, character, and death of President Lincoln, were in such sympathy with, and so expressive of the public mind and feeling, that its publication for future perusal, and to perpetuate the memory of that sad occasion, would be highly gratifying to all.

We therefore request, that you furnish us, at your earliest convenience, a copy of the discourse for publication.

Very Respectfully yours,

T. DEFORRIS,	G. L. CLARK,
G. V. EDWARDS,	S. COUCH,
L. COOLEY,	R. O. BARBER,
Z. C. PLATT,	J. J. DROWN,
E. HATHAWAY,	G. M. BECKWITH,
W. P. MOOERS,	W. W. HARTWELL,
G. A. DEWEY,	J. H. MOOERS,
P. D. MOORE,	J. C. WOOD,
G. F. BIXBY,	C. H. FOOTE.

GENTLEMEN :

You know the extreme haste, with which the discourse you ask of me for publication, was prepared. On this account I might well hesitate at submitting it to the criticism of the eye, although you were pleased to give it a considerate hearing. But if with its imperfections it can be of service to you, I will comply with your request, gratefully acknowledging your courtesy to me therein.

With much respect, yours,

EDWIN A. BULKLEY.

To DR. T. DEFORRIS and others.

DISCOURSE.

LAMENTATIONS V: 15, 16.—"THE JOY OF OUR HEART IS CEASED; OUR DANCE IS TURNED INTO MOURNING. THE CROWN IS FALLEN FROM OUR HEAD."

THE world's history cannot often have shown a more sudden and violent alternation of public feeling, than that which our nation has just suffered. A fortnight ago we were jubilant, as at no previous day of these times of frequent and high excitement. We had before hung out our flags, raised our huzzas, rang our bells, fired our salutes, and lighted our bonfires. But then there was a brimming and overrunning fullness of exultation, which rose from the assurance that our victories were not temporary and inconclusive, but presages of the certain and early end of that conspiracy against our government, gigantic in dimensions and wickedness, with which for four years we have been in a death-grapple. We felt when the capital of the rebellion was captured, that its heart was pierced, and its life already paralyzed at the extremities, must beat with ever feebler pulsations, and soon expire. Therefore we gave loose to our joys. Then as in daily succession, the tidings came to us of the army of the vanquished, dwindling in its flight, and at last surrendering and disbanding, our enthusiasm by its protracted exercise became spent, and subsided from open demonstration into calm and deep satisfaction. In such a frame the news fell upon us, sharp and rending as the lightning which bore it, that he on whom our national confidence was resting as never before, and whom we were becoming willing to trust in the perplexities of admin-

istration,—our President was dead,—dead by the hand of villainous assassination. Men told it to others, with awe-struck faces, tearful eyes, quivering lips, and choking utterance. They had not heart to go on in their pursuits. Sorrow and wrath, such as abhorent crime always arouses in the human breast, took strong hold of them. Gloom and despondency beclouded every countenance, and entered into every home. The contrast was complete. "The joy of our heart was ceased; our dance was turned into mourning; the crown was fallen from our head." We *were* like a harp, attuned to the highest pitch, and giving forth at every touch the lofty sounding chords of gladness, swelling more loudly at each impulse, then sinking into modulated and more perfect harmonies of cheerfulness. We *are* like that harp, struck by a ruthless, reckless hand, with a jangling discord, the strings unkeyed and snapt, and now we hear it only in the melancholy minor,—the sigh of sadness,—the wail of smitten and dismayed spirits.

The mourning of the people was so profound as to be oppressive, but it had a certain grandeur, which should not pass unnoticed. Our external reverence for authorities is not great. Yet beneath this seeming carelessness and disrespect, there rules a spirit which though it does not bend the knee and do the obeisance of form to a potentate, will sincerely honor while living, those who hold high place as the representatives of the nation, and as sincerely lament them when by their deaths important posts are vacated, and consequent loss and disorder are apprehended. Over and above all the divisions and animosities of partisan feeling, whenever a true occasion calls for it, another feeling shows itself to be controlling, thrusting down out of sight all that is contrary to it, and yielding all fit homage to those to whom homage is due. When I saw amid the other signs of last Saturday's sorrow, how not only men who had been the political admirers and adherents of President Lincoln, but also men who had been opposed to his principles, and even bitter against his administration were as touched, and stirred, and deeply bereaved

as others, and counted it a personal indignity that they should be suspected of gratification by the occurrence of his death, and how all unsympathizing expressions had to be suppressed or got quick rebuke, I was strengthened amid my sorrow. And when there followed from the public press of every variety of conflicting opinion, so unanimous an outburst of lamentation, and appeal for consolidated and persevering support of the government, my faith in my kind, and my faith in the republic was greatly renewed. I felt that there could be but few wretches so corrupted as to gloat over the foul deed that had been done, and that the cause of the country was not lost, when so many expressed their devoted determination, that it should not suffer the injury traitorous hands would have done it, by slaying its head.

A ruler's death could scarcely have taken place at a more inopportune time we thought, and therefore our grief was aggravated. As in previous stages of our contest, we may err in our calculations of what is needful in an emergency, but it seemed to us, at the first intelligence of our bereavement, that it would be well nigh ruin to our national interests. Though we are recovered from this feeling, and more hopeful, we are still anxious and apprehensive. The ship of state will perhaps steer wildly we fear, now that the skilled helmsman is taken from the wheel. His eye has grown wary as he has peered long into the cloudy night, through which we have been sailing ;—his hand has grown more firm, as the shock of the storm has threatened to tear away its grasp ;—his heart has grown more undaunted, as danger has lowered more fearfully near. And now as we are approaching the shallows and bars,—the narrow and tortuous channels,—the sunken rocks and boiling breakers,—over and through which we must enter the port of peace, we need all these for our safe piloting into the haven of our desires. If I have not misinterpreted public opinion, there has been an increasing confidence in President Lincoln's sincerity and integrity of purpose,—practical and comprehensive good sense,—benevolence and

magnanimity of disposition, and whatever have been our theories of administration, whoever our preferred exponents of these,—the people as a whole, were settling down into acquiescence and trust, in assurance that the reins of government were in wise and safe hands. It cannot be less than a severe calamity which removes him at this juncture. The man upon whom divine providence has let fall the mantle of succession may prove a true and fit man. God make him so, we heartily pray, in his private character and official acts. Yet we mourn, anxiety largely entering into our mourning, for the proven and the trusty has been taken away, and we crave the quieting of apprehension, lest some national disaster be brought upon us by mal-administration.

I cannot properly sketch the biography, or analyze the character of Abraham Lincoln, and therefore undertake only the briefest mention of incidents, and the merest outline of his personal and official traits.

Born in Kentucky in 1809, he was a little over fifty-six years of age, when death came to him in such shocking form. While a boy he removed to Indiana, where the scanty education was obtained, which was the basis of his subsequent attainments in self-improvement. He was a learner through all the opportunities of observation and information he had, whether on the farm, or the Mississippi flat-boat. Amid the vicissitudes of frontier life,—as a volunteer officer, beating back the incursions of the Indians,—as a tiller of the ground,—by the study and practice of law in the growing new settlements,—he gathered a varied experience and sturdy common sense, which afterwards made his resources for practical usefulness very great. He was not a professional and hackneyed politician, serving only a short period in his State legislature, and one term in Congress, before his nomination and election to the Presidency. Yet he was not altogether undistinguished in public life, for his associates held him in high repute as a clear-headed and serviceable legislator, and he could be no common thinker and speaker, who could debate side by side

through a whole campaign with a man of so eminent intellect and speech as Stephen A. Douglass, and receive at least equal laurels. The troublous times in which he was brought to rule over the nation, and the subsequent occurrences of four years, are fresh recollections with us, and material for a great historical era, the proper view of which, it is yet too early to take. The only re-elected President we have had for more than a quarter-century, he had but barely retaken the reins of government, with the prospect just opening before him of a more tranquil term of service, after gaining that one object eagerly desired by his patriot heart, the pacification and reconstruction of the Union, when he fell. Twice has the nation mourned for Presidents, early removed from office by death. Now for the first, for one taken away by the red hand of blood. God forbid that this should become an historic example in the career of our republic, and the criminal who writhes under the restraints or penalty of strong and righteous authority, be encouraged to resort to the assassin's cowardly weapon. What was the special motive of the misguided and guilty man who made one so noble and so needed as Abraham Lincoln his victim, we do not yet fully know. But let his deed serve as one more and ever memorable illustration of the essential barbarism and cruelty of that system, of which, from the depth of my soul I thank God, we see the last vestiges being expelled from our land.

With me, I think you will quite agree, that our late President was no ordinary statesman. Rough-hewn indeed, and unschooled in diplomatic phrase and usage, yet never losing sympathy with the people from whom he sprung, and so always able to speak and write to the mind and heart of the people, he was wise in the true policy of governing, and skillfully followed it. If he was not a bold leader, far outrunning and beckoning on the sentiment of the country, he kept pace with it, and gave full expression to it, when it wanted to find voice. No puppet he, to move as cabinet ministers behind pulled strings, and be but an echo of their

prompting. Not despising counsel, he could and would deliberate unto an independent conviction, and then fearlessly and immoveably plant himself upon it. There was a breadth about his ultimate opinions and decisions, which showed that thorough scanning had been given to every point of importance, and all the connected intricacies as nearly as possible unravelled. Let the proper expediency of his course of action be questioned, as it will be in the conflict of political theories, it must be conceded, that he has fully won rank and earned homage, as an intelligent and powerful ruler. Even from prejudiced, unfriendly critics, across the water, he has extorted a meed of praise, as in the connection of his late inaugural, when it is said, that "for political weight, moral dignity, and unaffected solemnity, it has had no equal in our time. No statesman ever uttered words, stamped at once with the seal of so deep a wisdom and so true a simplicity. The 'village attorney' of whom Sir G. C. Lewis and many other wise men wrote with so much scorn in 1861, seems destined to be one of those 'foolish things of the world' which are destined to confound the wise,—one of those weak things which shall 'confound the things that are mighty.'"

In the view of all, his administration has been a most eventful period, signalized by occurrences which must ever be memorable in our annals. When he first took the oath of office, rebellion was seething and hissing, in readiness for an early eruption, and soon the country's standard fell at the ever more dishonored spot where treason insulted it. Was it by coincidence or design, that when on the fourth anniversary of that shame, the Stars and Stripes were again unfurled over the ruined battlements of Sumpter, they had waved but a few hours, ere he was smitten down? And it comes up also to be noticed, as a coincidence at least by me, that going back four years from this very day of his burial, we reach the date when the first troops he summoned to save his capital from the grasp of rebellion, (of whom were some from my former pastoral charge), were murderously shot at in the

streets of Baltimore. How much of history has been wrought and written in these four years! Think of the innumerable armies, overawing even Europe by their multitude, mustered in for service, and mustered out by death. Think of the astounding development of our national power and prowess; —of the flowing in of resources faster than the drain upon them, of the rousing up of enterprise which has shaken off all drawbacks, and gone strait-forward;—of the accumulation of debt and the burdens of taxation, with the unmurmuring acquiescence of the people; of all the financial fluctuations and revolutions. Think of the alternate victories and defeats;— of the gory battle fields, from Gettysburgh, southward through the whole wide arena of conflict. Think of that glorious Edict of Freedom, which unloosed the fetters of millions of bondsmen, and gave them a legal liberty, becoming an actual liberty as fast as with our arms we opened our way into the house of their bondage. Compress all these, and other events which I cannot enumerate, into the space of these four years, and there is more history than often as many centuries will make. In it all Abraham Lincoln stands a central personage and controlling actor. Amid these associations, his era, if not his personal qualities and deeds, must make him historic and grand. As the world will judge ere long, a great man goes down to the grave to day.

We will all award him the distinction of genuine uprightness. "Honest" was a title with which his friends loved to honor him, and his political antagonists did not deny his desert of it. That there have been dishonesty and injustice among some of his subordinates is probably unquestionable,—and it should not be surprising,—in a government so extended,—in a time of disorder. Yet never we believe have these been practiced with his acquiescence even, and in no instance has there been any substantiated impeachment of his personal integrity. To an extent wonderful in such times of excitement and passion, even accusations and suspicions have been very infrequent. Significant testimony to his high honor and

trustworthiness, as given by a former associate in Congress, in a speech afterwards made in the secession convention of Virginia has only just been brought to light from among the dark secrets of that body.

His benevolent geniality and tenderness of disposition was certainly a high moral quality, though lately we almost began to fear it might lead to overkind and insufficient dealing with traitors. His buoyant good humor and outgushing wit was a part of this temper. Too constant and broad perhaps to satisfy our ideal of the refinement and dignity appropriate to a high official, it yet did not so much as it might seem detract from a suitable seriousness, being but the rippling of the surface and not the undercurrent, as our true and discerning English friend, Goldwin Smith witnessed, after interviews with him. For my part, I have often thought it a happy thing, that he was so made up, that he could relieve the stern, steady pressure of his crushing responsibilities, by a little by-play of the feelings. A better alleviation however, I rejoice to believe he had from the weight of official burdens ;—that prayerful spirit and habit, which led him early to ask the continued prayers of the nation, and to go aside in the morning hour for communion with God and His word. It is no newspaper gossip, but reliable testimony, that he was a Christian man, having learned his need of divine mercy through both the discipline of domestic and national affliction. Would that he had completed this testimony by the fuller confession of Christ through union with his Church ! But in this he was like too many of our public men ;—they delay duty till they return to private life, even when their convictions are established rightly ;—and so the scope and force of a proper example is reduced.

Whenever eulogy is attempted, however sincere we are in it, we are in danger of excess. But I do not go beyond an opinion, long honestly held, and gradually increasing, when I place the name of Abraham Lincoln, among the greatest of those which our republic has had to enshrine. George

Washington, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln, thus far in our history are the names, which the people shall first recall and honor. Greater than either we may find, in many attributes of a ruler. But in single-eyed, unselfish, earnest devotion to true and lasting popular interests, none. I know that this is anticipating the verdict of time. Yet the prediction is hazarded, that it will be so ;—and more that even the men of the South, now imbittered and hateful towards him who by the arm of power has asserted the supremacy of the Union, will by-and-by discern and afterwards confess, that his strengthening of federal authority and removal of the incubus of slavery, is their highest civil and social blessing.

With these features of his character before us, let us cherish and revere his memory.

When the bitter news of his assassination came to us, my mind ran over familiar history for parallels to it. There were examples of rulers and of aspirants for rule, who had gone out from life by violence and crime ;—through jealousy, ambition, revenge, or other base passions of the wicked ;—and through hatred of truth and goodness. There was Cæsar stabbed by Brutus. But the murdered triumvir was undermining the dearest liberties of Rome. So his death gave no resemblance, save perhaps as we think of the suicidal ingratitude towards our slain President, whose heart was beating with known intentions of leniency and generosity towards even double-dyed traitors. Then we might say, that as he received the fatal shot,

> "Ingratitude, more strong than traitor's arms
> Quite vanquished him : then burst his mighty heart."

There was Marat killed by Charlotte Corday. But then virtue was with the assassin, and not with the assassinated. He a bestial, lecherous tyrant. She a high-minded devotee, sacrificing her life for her country's freedom. But again I thought of William, Prince of Orange,—that noble man,—who under the delineation of Motley the historian, seems fully

the compeer of our own beloved Washington. Wise, energetic, undaunted, and patient, he had guided the Netherlands through their long and fierce war with the Spanish Empire, and all its fearful power as exercised by that inhuman monster, Alva, and the Inquisition as his agency. Victory, with deliverance and peace seemed near, when he was smitten by the ball of the assassin. The popular grief was intense. His character says the historian, "had been expanding steadily as the difficulties of his situation increased. There was such general confidence in his sagacity, courage, and purity, that the nation had come to think with his brain, and act with his hand. It was natural, that for an instant, there should be a feeling of absolute and helpless paralysis." The parallel is not far from perfect. We lament, with a sorrow like that of a household bereft of its head, one who as the people's leader, has led us through a fearful conflict with a power, overbearing and cruel like that of Spanish tyranny and inquisition. Its overthrow seems in sight. But the assassin's bullet has sped its way to the brain which would guide us, and the hand that we trusted to govern is powerless. For the rest ;—do you not remember the mourning, and the paralysis of last Saturday ?

We eulogize our great men dead, but in such an hour as this, I feel like the eminent French Preacher, who though the royalty and court of the 'Grand Monarch' were his audience, was unawed by their *little* greatness, and exclaimed 'Only God is GREAT.' Oh ! the littleness of man ! Oh ! the littleness of nations ! "Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to the earth." "Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance." "Mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the Most High, and praised and honored him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation ; and all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing ; and he

doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth ; and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou ?" The sovereignty of Jehovah is the *rebuke* of a sinful nation. The sovereignty of Jehovah is the *consolation* of an afflicted nation. The sovereignty of Jehovah is the *strength* of a resolute nation.

At this hour, the capital of the nation beholds an unwonted and never to be forgotten scene. A long, long procession,—slowly, sadly makes its way through a dense concourse of lookers on. There is a bereft and weeping woman, with two sons to give the support of their manhood and youth. Their's is a peculiar grief; but we pass it,—for other men besides Presidents leave widows and orphans, with bleeding hearts. There are others of the family of nations, by their eminent representatives paying reverential regard to the honored departed ; but we pass them,—for their's is but an outward, ceremonious sympathy. The sorrow-stricken and disconsolate NATION follows ; though all that attendant company inadequately shows the unnumbered multitudes of the land who mourn. Springing and commingled from every old world nationality, with one heart they prize our precious institutions, and lament him who as their head embodied their dignity and power. Yet others stand timidly aside, not yet fully accustomed to count themselves in with the people,—the long-oppressed but now delivered Africans, than whom none feel a sorer bereavement,—none shed more honest tears. It is their Liberator who is passing to the grave,—the man, whom God made the instrument of endowing them with freedom, and their sorrow goes far into the land, even to where liberty is waited for, and not yet realized, where the bondmen are doing the last of their unrequited toil, and they too take up the mourning, imperfectly knowing the name, yet cherishing the memory of LINCOLN. So we join to give him funereal honors, and the record shall say, as of the olden time, "All the people of Israel greatly bewailed him. They wept

many days and said, Why is that great man dead, who saved the people of Israel ?"

Men of the Republic ! Surely these solemn days should not sweep over us with their influence, as rolls a heavy wave, which subsiding, leaves no trace ! Shall we not draw nearer to God, with the cause of our country ? Shall we not draw nearer to each other, with one-hearted support and defence of all its imperilled interests ? Then no conspiracy can be destructive of our government ; no treason can strike the nation so that it shall die !

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